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DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E
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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: REACHING OUT TO THE OLF AND CUTTING
ERITREA'S DIVISIVE INFLUENCE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASON: 1.4 (D).

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY. Norwegian Church Aid representatives Arne Saeveraas and Hans Birkeland told Ambassador June 21 that while there was little progress on their mediation efforts between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ethiopian Government, they were keeping lines of communications open. The continued presence of OLF hard-liners and leaders in Asmara remains a stumbling block to progress in engaging Ethiopian leaders and the OLF, but the Norwegians are hopeful that they can bring moderate elements of the OLF into closer dialogue with Ethiopian officials. Sebhat Nega, TPLF central committee member and stalwart within the Ethiopian government, is scheduled to travel to Europe in the near future to meet with OLF representatives. The Norwegians believe that strong U.S. support for the moderate OLF leadership will help undercut Asmara's divisive influence and bolster a greater opening between the OLF and Ethiopian government. Embassy supports Norway's approach and believes encouragement of the Ethiopian Government and outreach to the OLF moderates on a dialogue will enhance internal Ethiopian peace and stability. END SUMMARY.

12. (S/NF) Norwegian Church Aid special advisor Arne Saeveraas and country representative Hans Birkeland briefed Ambassador on their latest discussions with Ethiopian officials on an OLF engagement. Saeveraas said Norwegian Church Aid and Norwegian Government remained hopeful but that the current dialogue between the OLF and Ethiopian Government (which is conducted in Brussels through former Ethiopian Ambassador to the U.S. and current Ambassador to the EU Berhane Gebrechristol) required higher Ethiopian attention. Ambassador Berhane, a conservative hard-line member of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), had been a barrier to dialogue. Saeveraas noted that TPLF central committee member and stalwart of the Ethiopian Government, Sebhat Nega, who remains a close advisor to Prime Minister Meles, plans to travel to Europe in August to meet with moderate OLF officials.

13. (S/NF) While Sebhat's involvement is hopeful, Saeveraas is trying to push the Ethiopians to reach out and engage the moderate elements of the OLF rather than to set conditions for expanded dialogue. Saeveraas noted that so long as Asmara hosted and played a significant role influencing the hard-line OLF members and much of the leadership, expanded OLF-Ethiopia dialogue would be difficult. Saeveraas said

moderate OLF leaders like former leader Leencho Lata were being marginalized by more hard-line members resident in Asmara.

U.S. MUST PLAY A ROLE

14. (S/NF) Saeveraas and Birkeland both underscored the importance of the U.S. to the process. Public encouragement by the U.S. and other countries for the moderate wing of the OLF would help bolster OLF leaders seeking a dialogue with Ethiopia and moderate the influence of the hard-liners in Eritrea. Saeveraas suggested that Norway could host a meeting of the OLF leadership, including those from Asmara, but there needed to be strong support from the U.S. and other countries to help moderate OLF leaders demonstrate to their membership that the path of dialogue was more effective than armed resistance and the more intolerant rhetoric of hard-line members.

15. (S/NF) Further, both Norwegian Church Aid officials said that the U.S. and other countries privately encouraging the Ethiopian Government to reach out to the moderate OLF leaders would be the best way to undercut Asmara's negative influence.

16. (S/NF) COMMENT. Over two years ago, the Africa Bureau, working with Norway, engaged moderate elements of the OLF and encouraged Prime Minister Meles and his envoy, Ambassador Berhane, to take a more positive approach to OLF-Ethiopia Government discussions. A meeting with some OLF leaders, including a few based in Asmara, over two years ago at the State Department, while highly encouraging, did not lead to

ADDIS ABAB 00001961 002 OF 002

greater USG involvement, because of the lack of interagency consensus and differing views with Post which did not fully support engagement.

17. (S/NF) COMMENT CONTINUED. Tough measures adopted by Ethiopian security forces in parts of the country in response to increased security threats and continued political differences between Oromo and Ethiopian Government leaders make dialogue between the Government and the OLF challenging. A dialogue with moderate elements, an effort Prime Minister Meles supports, should be encouraged. Post recommends that the interagency support the Norwegian efforts for a moderate OLF-Ethiopian Government dialogue, and that the U.S. play a greater supportive role, along with our European colleagues, in encouraging expanded dialogue. Getting the OLF leadership and supporters out of Asmara would be critical to a successful dialogue, but the U.S. and others will need to encourage the OLF that dialogue will be more beneficial in securing long-term peace, than armed resistance or opposition to dialogue. END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO